

Q FEVER (Query Fever)

What is Q fever?

Q fever is an illness characterized by a sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, weakness, malaise (a general sick feeling), and severe sweats. It is caused by an infection with a bacteria known as *Coxiella burnetii*. The infection occurs worldwide.

Who gets Q fever?

Q fever is a rare disease, but anyone can get Q fever if they are infected with *C. burnetii* bacteria. Persons at highest risk for Q fever are those who work with animals that are infected, including veterinarians, meat workers, sheep workers and farmers. *C. burnetii* may be found in sheep, cattle, goats, cats, dogs, some wild animals (including bandicoots and many wild rodents), birds and ticks.

How is Q fever spread?

Q fever is spread to humans primarily through airborne dissemination of contaminated dust. Dust becomes contaminated with *C. burnetii* bacteria that are present in the tissues or bodily fluids of infected animals, and this contaminated dust may be spread for up to half a mile. Direct contact with infected animals or materials that they have contaminated (such as straw or other bedding materials) may also cause an infection. Raw or unpasteurized milk from infected cows or goats may be capable of spreading *C. burnetii*. Direct person-to-person spread is very uncommon, but can happen.

What are the symptoms of Q fever?

Q fever is characterized by a sudden onset of a fever, with other symptoms that include chills, headache, weakness, malaise (a general sick feeling), and severe sweats. Other complications may occur, including pneumonitis (inflammation of the lungs), abnormal liver function tests, chronic endocarditis (inflammation of the heart), and neurologic problems.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

This is variable, but 2-3 weeks after exposure is the most common.

How is Q fever diagnosed?

Blood tests can be used to diagnose Q fever.

What is the treatment for Q fever?

Doctors can prescribe antibiotics for Q fever.

How can Q fever be prevented?

People who work with animals who may be infected need to know the signs and symptoms of Q fever and seek treatment if they feel they could be infected. There is a Q fever vaccine that is currently not available for general use, but may be available through the Department of Defense for persons who are known to be at high risk of exposure.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor.
- Your local health department listed in your telephone directory.
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191.

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